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ABSTRACT

A study investigated what fourth grade students understand about composing personal narrative discourse. Specifically, the study explored what the subjects understood about structuring personal narrative texts and about evaluating a narrated experience for an audience. Subjects were 13 fourth grade students, and the methodology consisted of participant observation, introspective interviewing, and analyses of written texts. The results indicated that the subjects were able to articulate a narrative schema closely paralleling descriptions of narrative discourse that text linguists offer. They also expressed a preference for more highly evaluative ways of reporting events when presented with alternative ways of expressing their narratives. The findings suggest that fourth grade students have internalized a narrative schema that may influence the structure of their written productions. The findings also suggest that the students employ a variety of syntactic constructions in their texts to mark the significance of narrated events for the reading audience. (Author/HTH)

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Fourth Graders' Understanding of Personal Narrative Discourse

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Fourth Graders' Understanding of Personal Narrative Discourse

This study was an investigation of what fourth graders understand about composing personal narrative discourse. It explored what the writers understood about structuring personal narrative texts and about evaluating a narrated experience for an audience of readers.

The method of constructing this understanding was multi-faceted. It included participant observation, introspective interviewing and analysis of written texts.

The results indicated that fourth graders were able to articulate a narrative schema that closely paralleled descriptions of narrative discourse text linguists offer. They also expressed a preference for more highly evaluative ways of reporting events when presented with alternative ways of expressing their narratives.

These results suggest that fourth graders have internalized a narrative schema that may influence the structure of their written productions. It also suggests that fourth graders employ a variety of syntactic constructions in their texts to mark the significance of narrated events for an audience of readers.

Fourth Graders' Understanding of Personal Narrative Discourse

Introduction

Language is a system of available options not yet in use. To produce a text, writers must choose from among hundreds, even thousands, of linguistic options. This process of actualization, of text building, then, demands that writers make decisions about language. But what kinds of decisions do writers make? What motivates writers to construct texts in the ways they do?

Research in composition, in text linguistics, and in cognitive psychology offers us some good guesses about writers' production strategies. Factors that influence writers' language choices may include the aim or purpose of the text, the audience for whom the text is intended, and the writer's familiarity with a particular text type or with the macrostructures of text types (van Dijk, 1975). Informed as these guesses might be by discourse theory and by descriptions of written products, they still remain guesses about what writers consider when constructing texts. To account for texts means that researchers must also rely on writers, rather than solely on what they have written, to learn about choices and decisions as they really exist.

This study was an attempt to move beyond assumptions and descriptions of static written products toward an investigation of writers' discourse production strategies. Specifically, the study addressed this question: What do fourth grade writers understand about producing personal narrative texts? It explored what the young writers understood about structuring personal narratives and about evaluating an experience for an audience of readers.

Text linguists, most notably Labov and Waletzky (1967), van Dijk (1975), Todorov (1976), Bowditch (1976), Dolozel (1976), Longacre and Levinsohn (1978), and Genot (1979), have described narrative discourse in terms of the macrostructure or suprasentential structure of finished texts. Cognitive psychologists' research on comprehension and story grammars, like that which Mandler and Johnson propose (1977, 1978) complements the descriptions of narrative discourse text linguists offer. All of these researchers characterize narrative's macrostructure in only slightly different ways. The considerable amount of overlap among their descriptions of macrocategories suggests that there is an "ideal" story structure. Van Dijk's framework will illustrate this ideal structure; Labov's, Genot's, Longacre and Levinsohn's, and Mandler and Johnson's frameworks, so similar to van Dijk's, are summarized in Table 1 on page 4.

The first structural feature of narrative text in van Dijk's schema is an optional narrative feature called the abstract. The abstract signals what the narrative will be about and plays an important role in setting readers' expectations and in facilitating comprehension of the text. The exposition, the complication, and the resolution, the next three macrocategories in van Dijk's scheme, are essential narrative features. The exposition contains setting or backgrounding information that precedes the actual beginning of temporally sequenced events. Narrative events build to a complication, the peak of the story. A resolution follows which reports a result or conclusion to the narrated events. There may be an evaluative tract in which the writer elaborates upon the significance of the reported events. The final, optional category van Dijk calls the moral. Here the writer may comment upon what he/she has learned as a result of the narrated experience, or how the events have influenced his/her present behavior or thinking.

Narrative macrostructures of the kind van Dijk, Labov and others describe represent structural plans narrative texts follow. But are they plans that young

writers follow or plans that young writers articulate when they talk about their writing decisions? If we assume a correspondence between a text's structural plan and a writer's plan, we may be tempted to argue that writers' choices have to do, in part, with structural realities of texts that narrative analysts have described. Do fourth graders' narrative composing decisions and choices represent conceptual departures from the narrative schemata text linguists and cognitive psychologists propose?

We might ask similar questions about sentence-level and word-level narrative composing choices. What kind of "packaging" decisions do fourth graders make when relating a personal experience to an unfamiliar audience? Do they decide upon or choose particular structures in order to make explicit for an unfamiliar reader what meaning or significance they attach to the events they report? Work by Labov (1972) and, earlier, by Labov and Waletzky (1967) centers on narrative structure at the clause, phrase and word levels. Labov found, after analyzing over two hundred narratives, that particular syntactic constructions served an "evaluative" function in the texts. These syntactic constructions, which Labov classified under the four categories intensifiers, correlatives, comparators and explicatives, represented departures from the less complex "basic narrative syntax (1972)." Evaluation, as Labov defines it, refers to those parts of the story that mark the importance or significance the reported events had for the narrator. Evaluative devices point to the narrative's "raison d' être: why it was told and what the narrator is getting at (1972,p.366)."

Other linguists distinguish evaluation of the narrative, sometimes called the commentary on the action, from the action structures that move the story forward along a time line (van Dijk, 1975; Todorov,1976; Bowditch,1976; Dolowitz, 1976; Longacre and Levinsohn, 1978; and Genot,1979). One purpose of this study was to explore fourth graders' use and understanding of evaluation in their personal narratives. What strategies, if any, did these writers have for marking

TABLE 1

A SUMMARY OF NARRATIVE ANALYSTS' DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN TWO LEVELS OF NARRATIVE TEXTS

<u>Analyst</u>	<u>Action Levels</u>	<u>Commentative Levels</u>
Bowditch	<u>Narrative</u> - comprised of both the temporal and durative/descriptive structures in the text.	<u>Narrative Text</u> - includes the narrative plus any evaluative devices a narrator uses to comment upon the narrative from a perspective outside the narrated experience.
Dolezel	<u>Static and Dynamic Motifs</u> - describe action and represent states and events.	<u>Meta Motifs</u> - statements about motifs in the text which constitute commentaries on or evaluations of the actions.
Genot	<u>Action Structures</u> - include processes and actions. They are narrative propositions that can be ordered along a time line.	<u>Commentative Structures</u> - include events and situations. They are descriptive propositions which refer to states or events that are independent of the time line. Commentative structures make interpretations of narratives possible.
Labov and Waletzky	<u>Narrative Clauses</u> - those whose order and placement in the text are fixed; i.e. they cannot be repositioned without disrupting the original semantic interpretation of the narrative. These clauses most often fulfill a referential function in the text.	<u>Free and Restricted Clauses</u> - those whose placement in the sequence may range within the narrative without disrupting the original semantic interpretation. These clauses most often fulfill evaluative functions.
Todorov	<u>Narrative Text</u> - tells the story.	<u>Metatext</u> - gives an interpretation of the story.

the significance of a narrated event for an unfamiliar reader? On what bases did the writers decide upon elaborative options in their texts? These questions about choices and decisions about syntax and text structure are questions the present study attempted to answer.

Fourth Graders' Understanding of Narrative Structure: Methodology

The methodology employed for the present study was multi-faceted. It combined participant observation, introspective interviewing and analyses of written texts. Because I wanted to understand the process of composing personal narratives from the perspective of fourth graders, I enlisted their aid in helping me shape and correct my understanding of their composing decisions and choices. Thirteen fourth graders--six boys and seven girls-- participated in the study; their input came at several stages during the investigation, during two composing sessions and three interview sessions. The fourth graders were selected primarily on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Their classroom teacher's recommendations, my sense of the rapport I had established with the students during my observation visits to their classroom, and my desire to have a range of writing abilities represented in the study also informed my selection.

I began my investigation by asking the entire group of participants, along with their non-participant classmates, to respond to the following writing task:

Think of a time when you got into some of the worst trouble you have ever been in. Imagine you must write a story about this troublesome time for someone you do not know very well. Write your story so that this person will be able to understand what happened and why it was such bad trouble.

After reading this task to the fourth graders, I explained that they would have

as much time as they needed to respond to the assignment. While students wrote, I kept a tape recorder running so that I would have a record of any comments or questions the students raised during this initial composing session. I emphasized that there were no right or wrong ways to respond to the task. Many writers raised questions about the task and about my expectations. To these, I simply responded non-directively by encouraging them to do what they thought best. On the assignment sheets on which the task was printed, I asked students to record their questions and concerns. These tape recorded and written questions, such as, "How do you want the beginning?" suggested questions I would ask the writers during the subsequent interview sessions.

Within three weeks of this initial composing session, I met with each individual participant for a second composing session. The purpose of this second meeting was two-fold. First, I wanted to elicit a second personal narrative text from the participants on topics of their own choosing. Second, I wanted to use the composing session to elicit talk from the writers about their narrative composing strategies and about their structuring of personal narrative texts. Requiring the participants to compose on two separate occasions was an attempt to address the issue of a writer's competence versus his or her performance, although this problem is not easily resolved in any study of linguistic abilities. The fact that writers responded to two different kinds of tasks, one assigned and one self-selected, also afforded me an opportunity to investigate some hypotheses I had about the effects of assigned tasks on writing quality. Requiring that participants respond a second time to a writing task of their own choosing was also a way to insure that all participants were faced with an equal task (Applebee, 1972). For this composing session there was, obviously, no printed task writers needed to respond to. Instead, I asked each writer to think of an important time in his or her life he or she remembered well enough to write about. If none

came to mind, I suggested "categories" of experiences to them such as the happiest, scariest, saddest, most embarrassing, or most exciting time they remembered. When each writer had decided upon a topic, I gave the following directions with the topics substituted in the blank space:

Write a story about this (frightening) time so that
someone who doesn't know about it would be able to understand
what happened and why it was (frightening).

The writers had as much time as they needed to complete their narratives. The entire session was taped so that any questions the participants asked, any talking they did about their narratives, could be recorded.

As the fourth graders wrote, I noted any changes they made in their drafts. I also monitored their "composing tempos;" when they paused for more than a few seconds or made changes, I asked the writers to talk about what they had been considering. Often the writers raised questions or problems, such as, "I'm not sure how to do the ending," or "Should I put in when this happened?" I responded non-directively by asking the writers to talk more about what had prompted their questions. I noted any text features, such as "start," "detail," or "ending" writers named when they asked questions about or discussed their drafts. These writer-generated features became the bases for questions about narrative structure I asked later in the interview session after the writing had been completed. Most of the questions, then, were suggested by the informants' discussion of their narratives. I did, however, ask a series of standard questions of each participant, of which the following are examples:

What was the easiest/most difficult thing about writing this?
Were there things you thought about putting into this story but didn't?
When you write stories about yourself, do you usually write them a
certain way?

Asking these questions yielded more information about the writers' understanding of narrative, about the choices and decisions they claimed to have made while

composing.

Before meeting with each informant individually again, I transcribed the tape recordings of our first and second composing sessions and abstracted from them the informants' descriptions of narrative structural features. I copied the names writers ascribed to the structural features onto index cards. In addition, I typed copies of both the trouble story and the free-choice narrative each writer had composed. When I next met with each of the informants individually, I presented each with a set of index cards on which were written the names of the narrative features he/she had mentioned during previous meetings. I explained to the fourth graders that I wanted to check this information with them to make sure I had understood them and that I had not forgotten anything. I also asked the writers to tell me if any of the cards I showed did not belong, and to correct or change anything they felt needed correcting. I then presented the index cards one at a time to the informants and asked them to talk as much as they could about each one. In addition, I asked that they group cards that seemed to name the same kind of thing together. Finally, I asked writers to put the index cards in the order in which they would likely put these "things" if they were to write a story about themselves like the stories they had already completed. When they had finished sorting and ordering the cards, the writers next had to locate the features they had just discussed in their stories. The writers used variously colored marking pens to underline incidences of these features on the typewritten copies of the two narratives they had written previously. This step was of crucial importance, for it prevented me from making any false assumptions about what writers meant by particular features. For example, simply because writers had referred to a narrative feature called "ending," I could not assume that my understanding was the same as theirs. Neither could I assume that one informant's understanding was the same as another informant's.

Finally, I presented writers with four narratives, also written by fourth

graders, that I had taken from the files of the Buffalo Cross-Sectional Study of Writing Competence.* I read these narratives to the participants and asked them to indicate whether they felt each sample was complete according to the features of narrative they had described earlier. The purpose was to elicit further talk from the informants about narrative features and to see whether they would name additional narrative features in their discussions of texts.

Results

The data collected in this first phase of the study strongly support three conclusions about the thirteen fourth graders' understanding of the structure of personal narrative texts:

1. Each of the thirteen fourth graders understood a great deal about the structure of personal narrative texts.
2. Their descriptions of structural features they claimed to incorporate into their narratives were strikingly similar to definitions text linguists ascribe to particular narrative features.
3. One crucial difference in understanding of narrative distinguished writers who produced "true narratives" from writers who produced what Arthur Applebee has called "focused chains" (1978, pp. 56-72). That difference had to do with the writers' understanding that narratives ought to center around some point--around what some fourth graders called the "main part" or the "main object"--that makes evident the remarkable thing about the narrated events that made them worth telling.

This section will explore these three conclusions in a discussion of narrative structure from the perspective of the fourth grade informants. Throughout this discussion, I shall rely on the names the fourth graders most frequently used for particular narrative features.

*Planned as a data-base for descriptive studies of writing performance, the design for the sample and for specific writing tasks was developed in early 1976 by Charles Cooper, Lee Odell and Cynthia Watson. During the 1976-77 school year, Charles Cooper and Cynthia Watson coordinated the gathering of the writing samples from school districts in New York, Michigan, and Illinois. Subsequently, Charles Cooper and Lee Odell supervised the primary-trait scoring of the sample.

I. The Narrative's Beginning

All thirteen informants named "beginning" as a feature they include when they compose personal narratives. They called it, variously, "the start," "the first part," "the starting" and "the beginning part."

All of the informants characterized the beginning as containing at least one of the following: the time the narrated events occurred, the place or setting in which the events occurred, the characters involved in the reported incident, and a capsule summary of either what the story would be about or of the writer's opinion or attitude toward the narrated experience. The writers expressed their own sense of beginnings as backgrounding information, as preliminary setting information for their stories. As one informant put it, "the first part is the plain part; there's not much excitement. It's just like regular life, like 'I was walking down the street.' It's kind of boring." (For a complete discussion of the participants' discussions of narrative features see Pollard, 1984). Their characterizations of what they called the narrative's beginning look very much like a description of what Labov and Waletzky (1968) and van Dijk (1975) call the narrative's abstract (a summary of what the story will be about) and the orientation (setting information). Beginnings, then, are clearly part of these fourth graders' narrative schemata. Yet even though the writers claimed that beginnings that provided backgrounding or setting information were part of their narrative writing plans, many expressed difficulty deciding on how much backgrounding information was enough to orient readers. The implications of this will be discussed later in this report.

II. The Narrative's Middle

"Middle" is a feature all thirteen writers named as part of their narrative structural plan. Their definitions of a narrative's middle, and even their iden-

tification of middles in their own texts, suggest crucial differences among the writers' conceptualizations of personal narrative texts. Here we can rely on Arthur Applebee's (1978) distinction between what he called "focused chains" and "narratives" to characterize these differences. A focused chain, as Applebee has defined it, is a sequence of events linked one to the other with no point or theme abstracted, no climax or complication that make the events remarkable. A narrative, on the other hand, is organized around a point or theme. With this distinction in mind, we are in a better position to understand the differences among the fourth graders' notions of narrative middles.

For five of the informants in this study, middles of stories appear to be understood simply as sequences of events that lead only to a last event and not necessarily to any point or conclusion in the text. As one informant defined it, the middle is "everything that happens between the first thing and the last thing." The other eight fourth graders in the study, however, described middle as the plot-advancing information that moves the text toward a point or a complication in the action. A middle "helps the story along until you get to the main object of the story... it's what happens until the story gets more exciting before the interesting part."

III. The Main Part of the Narrative

The same eight fourth graders who conceived of a narrative's middle as plot-advancing information leading to a point or a complication named the "main part" or the "main object" as a feature of their written personal narratives. The "main part," as the eight writers described it, was "the interesting thing about the story," the thing that made it worth telling or in some way remarkable. Their understanding of the "main part" was of crucial importance. It impacted on their understanding of narrative's middle, ending, and even on their use of

details in their texts, and on the quality of their writing, as we shall see later.

IV. The Narrative's Ending

All but one of the eight fourth graders who cited a "main part" as a feature of narrative defined "ending" either as a commentary upon the narrated events or as a resolution to a narrative crisis or complication. This understanding of ending was quite different from the other six informants' definitions of "ending." For these writers, five of whom seemed to conceive of the narrative production task of chaining event 1 to event 2 to event 3, etc., the ending was, not surprisingly, described as event N, or the last event in the sequence. As one informant explained, as ending is "the last thing that happens... Like if you wrote a story about visiting your grandmother, it could be like you had dinner or you sleep."

V. Narrative Details

Seven of the thirteen fourth graders in this study, the same seven who conceived of endings as a comment upon or resolution to the narrated events, also described a feature they called "detail" or "extra little thing" as part of their narrative plan. As these seven writers conceived of narrative texts, details are not an essential narrative feature in the sense that a reader would still understand a narrative's plot without them. Rather, details are "extra little things that make a story more interesting." From their discussions of what they called detail, and from the details they identified in their texts, it is clear that what the writers considered detail is part of what Labov and Waletzky have called evaluation of the narrative. Their use of detail in their own texts reflects an elaborative choice, not a conscious one, perhaps, but nonetheless a

decision to bring into focus or highlight particular aspects of the narrated event that directly contribute to the points of their narratives, to that which makes them worth telling. This same elaborative control is not in evidence in most of the narratives written by the six informants who did not discuss detail as a narrative's feature. For those writers, elaboration seems less directed or even undirected at times. A fuller discussion of the fourth graders' understanding and use of evaluation follows in the discussion of the second phase of this study.

Fourth Graders' Understanding and Use of Evaluation: Methodology

One purpose of this study was to explore fourth graders' understanding and use of evaluation in their personal narratives. Evaluative devices, as Labov and other linguists cited earlier describe them, are strategies narrators may use to mark the significance of reported events. Labov was able to identify several syntactic constructions that often serve an evaluative function in narrative. These constructions he classified under four function categories: intensifiers, comparators, correlatives and explicatives. A full discussion of Labov's categorization scheme of evaluative devices and how he arrived at it would involve a rather detailed discussion of syntax that would shift the focus of this report. What I will address, instead, is the methodology I employed to determine whether evaluating a narrated experience for an audience was a composing consideration for the participants in this study. The primary methodological problem was designing a probe that would elicit talk from the informants about their understanding and use of evaluation. I reasoned that young writers, or any writer for that matter, might have difficulty articulating their understanding of evaluation and some of their composing decisions and choices. Part of this difficulty we can account for by realizing that much of a writer's under-

standing of composing is tacit knowledge. The methodological problem, then, becomes how to make writers "aware of their own awareness" (La Brie, 1981). Offering writers linguistic options and asking them to describe any differences they see between the choices is one way to elicit talk about this tacit knowledge. In explaining differences they see between options, writers must rely on and articulate personal criteria that account for the distinctions they see between, say, one syntactic construction and another. The instrument I designed to probe the fourth graders' understanding of evaluation and their composing decisions and choices required the writers to do just that. The instruments which presented the participants with linguistic options were modified versions of their own texts that offered the writers alternative ways of expressing their stories. To make these modifications, I first isolated sentences or phrases in their original narratives which contained the evaluative devices detailed in Labov's scheme. I then revised these sentences so they were either less evaluative or lacking in evaluation. Sentences were never made more highly evaluative in order to avoid cuing writers to evaluative strategies they might not otherwise produce. (A sample modified text is printed in Pollard, 1984).

I typed these modified texts and presented each of the thirteen informants with modified versions of his/her two narratives written during earlier composing sessions. I explained to the writers that the changes I had made in their texts were not corrections, nor were they necessarily better ways of expressing their stories. I also assured them that there were no right or wrong answer to the questions I would ask them about the texts, and that I was only interested in knowing whether they thought the changes made any differences in their stories.

During these interview sessions, the informants sat beside me and looked on as I read from the typed versions of the modified texts. Any time we reached a juncture where options for telling were offered, I stopped reading and asked

the writers to describe what difference, if any, one way of expressing their story would make compared to the other. I also asked them to tell me if they felt no differences between alternatives existed. Finally, I asked writers to talk about which option, if any, they preferred in their stories. These preferences they marked with an X on the modified texts. All of these interviews were tape recorded, and these tapes were transcribed for the purpose of categorizing the writers' responses.

Results

Perhaps the most important finding I can report is that the fourth graders' discussion of linguistic options suggests that all thirteen informants understood a good deal about the function of evaluative devices in narratives, and they expressed a preference for more fully evaluated ways of expressing their stories when presented with with less evaluative alternatives. Table 2 on page 16 includes the four function categories I derived from my analysis of transcripts of interviews which focused on the modified texts. Below each category head are listed constructions present in their narratives that writers claimed fulfilled these functions. Some constructions appear in more than one category because the writers ascribed more than one function to them. What follows is a discussion of the findings presented in that table.

I. Mutualization

The first category I have named Mutualization. Mutualization, as I define it, refers to the writer's attempt to accommodate an audience needing to understand the significance the writer attaches to the narrated experience. Under the mutualization category is a variety of strategies the writers claimed to use to make explicit for readers the ideas, feelings and motives of the writer

TABLE 2

WRITERS' CATEGORIES FOR EVALUATION AND
DEVICES FOR EXPRESSING EVALUATION

1. Mutualization
 - a. Use of adjectives to classify people, objects, events
 - b. Use of dialogue
 - c. Reports of reactions, feelings and thoughts of narrator and significant others in the text
 - d. Introductory global commentary on narrated experience
 - e. Concluding commentary on narrated experience

2. Contributing to the Sound of the Text
 - a. Use of adverbs
 - b. Use of underlining
 - c. Use of capitalization
 - d. Use of interjections
 - e. Use of exclamation marks
 - f. Use of high imagaic lexical items

3. Amplification
 - a. Use of adverbs of degree, time and frequency
 - b. Use of underlining
 - c. Use of capitalization
 - d. Use of interjections
 - e. Use of exclamation marks
 - f. Use of high imagaic lexical items
 - g. Repetition of information
 - h. Use of prepositional phrases to indicate manner

4. Emphasizing Remarkableness
 - a. Reports of unrealized possibilities
 - b. Quantification
 - c. Use of adverbs
 - d. Use of underlining
 - e. Use of capitalization
 - f. Use of exclamation marks

and significant others in the narrative. One such strategy was the use of dialogue, an important tool for making readers identify with narrative crises. Other, more indirect reports of thought and feelings, such as "I prayed with all my might," according to the fourth graders, serve the same purpose as dialogue. The informants also described more global kinds of commentary, such as introductory or concluding statements summarizing the writer's attitude toward a narrated experience, like, "That was my worst Thanksgiving," as helping readers understand the story better. A final mutualization strategy involved using adjectives to classify or mark significant people or objects in the text. For example, in a story about ruining a neighbor's fence, one informant claimed that classifying the fence as "new" and "shiny" was important because readers "need that kind of information or else no one would care about what happened."

The informants' focus on readers suggests that these fourth graders write with an awareness of audience and have a repertoire of strategies they use to bring a reader's experience of a narrated event into alignment with their experience of it.

II. Sound of the Text

Much of the fourth graders' discussion of the linguistic options with which I presented them in their modified narratives centered on the "sound" of their narratives. They showed concern about accommodating for the lack of sound -- in its most literal sense -- in their writing. To communicate the "sound" of their pieces, the informants relied on the strategies listed under Contributing to the Sound of the Text in Table 2. The first strategy, use of adverbs, is widely used so that, as one informant explained, the writing will not "sound plain." Underlining, capitalizing and using interjections and exclamation marks as in "Boy, did I get in TROUBLE!" were also described as controlling the sound

("fast," "not plain") of the stories. A final strategy, the use of high imagaic lexical items (as in using "blasted the ball" rather than "kicked the ball") was used to make the narrative "more exciting sounding."

The writers' preferences for options they claimed made a difference in the sound of their texts seems to have at least two motivations. One is a need for imagistic detail or vividness and the second is a need for cadence and rhythm that approximate actively engaged speech. The writers seemed to understand "sound," then, as making both an informational and stylistic contribution to their texts.

III. Amplification

All of the strategies the writers claimed contributed to the sound of their narratives were also cited as amplifying feelings or intended effects. Thus, use of adverbs, interjections, capitalization, underlining, and high imagaic lexical items are listed under the "Amplification Function" in Table 2. These strategies the writers used to make events seem "more" or "bigger" than ordinary, as in the sentence, "We really got into trouble then." It is, perhaps, not surprising that the fourth graders ascribed both amplification and intonation functions to the same constructions. In speech, a narrator's attempt to intensify a particular effect is often accompanied by vocal stress and a rising intonation.

Two additional strategies, repetition of information and the use of particular prepositional phrases to indicate manner (as in "I prayed and prayed with all my might") appear to fulfill the amplifying functions as well.

IV. Emphasizing the Remarkableness

Emphasizing the remarkableness of narrated experiences was an important consideration for the fourth grade narrators. In this last category of evalua-

tive devices are constructions writers used to convey how extraordinary or close to extraordinary, the narrated events were. Pointing to unrealized possibilities, to events that could have occurred in the narrator's world (as in, "I almost broke my fingers") was one strategy the informants claimed contributed to the interesting level of their stories. Quantifying objects, people and events, using adverbs, underlining, capitalization and exclamation marks also appear in the list of strategies under this final category.

V. Factors that Influenced Evaluation in the Narratives

Distinctions among categories are not always clean; the number of strategies that overlap categories in Table 2 testifies to that. But to collapse the functions to one such as "Demonstrate Remarkableness for Readers" (which is, after all, a definition of the function of evaluative devices) would be to blur the distinctions writers described when they discussed their narratives. What is perhaps most evident from their talk is that these fourth graders seem to have a basic understanding of evaluation in personal narrative writing. They can describe differences particular linguistic options make in their stories. They consider the effect their words have on the sound of their narratives, and on the impact they might have on potential readers. Yet this is not to suggest that these writers consciously manipulated or intended to include the particular evaluative strategies detailed above. With a single exception or two, their language seems to be a consequence of their having reported experiences which they valued, or to which they had already attached some significance. This hypothesis may help account not only for the presence of evaluative devices in these fourth graders' texts, but also for their absence.

To explain, let me first point to an additional, though not surprising, finding. That is, the writers' use of evaluative strategies varied, both by

type and frequency, from one narrative to the other. Attempting to account for these inconsistencies in performance was illuminating. Three factors, which emerged from the discussions during the composing sessions I had tape recorded, seemed to have influenced the evaluative component of the narratives.

The first consideration, which arose in connection with the trouble narrative, was the inaccessibility of certain experiences the writer was required to narrate. Having to respond to an assigned task constrained two writers who could not think of a troublesome incident to report. This "lack of information" caused by an inaccessible topic manifested itself as an unelaborated and/or under-elaborated text.

A second consideration for at least two other writers was the issue of self-disclosure. While these informants had information -- troublesome experiences they could have reported -- they were unwilling to make this information public. They chose to report the experience minimally rather than write about experiences that were, in their words, "too embarrassing."

The motivation to tell was a third factor that seemed to have influenced evaluation in the texts. For example, one informant's motivation to tell her story was apparently dissipated by her discussing the experience she would narrate before composing her narrative. Examination of her written text showed it to be less evaluative than her highly evaluative oral telling of the story that preceded the writing. What would motivate a fully elaborated, evaluated second telling if the point had already been made? All three considerations that seemed to have influenced evaluation in the writers' narratives have important implications for the teaching of writing that are addressed in the discussion that follows.

Discussion

The data collected during the interviews with the thirteen participants

point to several conclusions regarding fourth graders' understanding of narrative discourse and their metalinguistic abilities. Seven fourth graders in this study demonstrated, through their descriptions and explanations of narrative features, that their understanding of narrative structure closely parallels the descriptions text linguists offer. The remaining six of the thirteen participants understood clearly the function of a narrative's beginning. They were also able to articulate a general description of middles and endings as ordered sequences of events.

We can ask what it might mean that seven writers could so fully describe the structural features of narrative discourse and that the other six could at least offer an adequate description. Here we can rely on Schank and Abelson's work (1977) on scripts and plans, and on Mandler and Johnson's work (1977) on story grammars and comprehension for an explanation. Both Schank and Abelson and Mandler and Johnson address the important role internalized schemata play in both comprehension and production of spoken and written texts. We might compare schemata to internalized plans or blueprints onto which we map productions. The fact that most of the fourth graders could describe narrative plans that closely match text linguists descriptions of "ideal" narratives suggests that these young writers have internalized a narrative schema that may influence the ways they structure their texts.

The way people build schemata, cognitive psychologists maintain, is through experience with text types. That is to say, a writer's experience, both with spoken and written narratives, helps to shape a narrative schema. It would seem sound pedagogical practice, then, to provide writers with frequent reading experiences so that one activity can enrich and inform the other. The connections between reading and writing experience and precisely how one influences the other is an important avenue for researchers to pursue.

One teaching practice that does not seem warranted by the findings is explicitly teaching discourse structure. At least in the case of narrative writing, the thirteen participants had already "learned" a narrative structure. The difficulties they had while composing had to do with negotiating decisions about content within that framework. A more useful focus for writing instruction would be one that supports writers who are grappling with decisions about content and meaning.

One important finding of this study was that fourth graders, when offered alternatives, most often expressed a preference for more highly evaluative ways of expressing their narratives. They were also able to articulate the effects particular evaluative devices had on their texts. One of these effects had to do with contextualizing information for an audience of readers. That is, the fourth graders preferred alternatives that provided readers with information about the situational and emotional contexts that surrounded narrated events. This finding is quite significant, for it indicates that the fourth grade participants wrote with an awareness of adapting to an audience. Although the writers did not always successfully accommodate readers' needs, they expressed a conscious attempt to do so. Research that has examined young writers' awareness of audience has pointed to the writers' egocentrism and the difficulty young writers often have anticipating audience needs (Kroll, 1978). The results of this study raise questions about young writers' audience awareness. How early do children link composing decisions to accommodating readers? What other strategies, in addition to evaluative devices the participants in this study discussed, do young writers employ to meet audience needs? Addressing questions like these will refine our understanding of the role of audience adaptation in composing processes.

Other findings associated with the presence of evaluative devices in fourth graders' personal narrative texts have important implications for teaching.

In some cases discussing an experience prior to writing about it had a negative effect on the evaluative component of the narrative. Telling the story orally seemed to dissipate the writer's desire to tell an experience in writing. Traditionally, teachers have used class discussion as a prewriting activity to spark students' interest or ideas. This study suggests that, in some cases, discussion may have an opposite, unintended effect on writing. I do not mean to suggest that talking is not a valuable method of exploring ideas, of rehearsing and recalling information that will be included in written texts. Perhaps the assumption that discussion is always beneficial to writers, however, ought to be examined.

Although it was not the goal of this study to explore fourth graders' metalinguistic abilities, the data lends itself to such a purpose. During the interviews, the informants demonstrated their sensitivity to the differences particular linguistic options made in their texts. When discussing narratives I had drawn from the files of the Buffalo Cross-Sectional Study of Writing Competence, the students were able to articulate features of narrative, criteria by which they judge the completeness of a text. These findings suggest that children as young as ten years of age could be helpful respondents to their peers' writing. While much has been written in support of peer group conferencing-- most notably Peter Elbow's (1972) and James Moffett's (1968) work-- there has been little documentation of precisely how helpful students, particularly younger, more inexperienced writers can be to one another. This study suggests that fourth graders are able to discuss critically their own narrative texts and those written by other ten-year-old writers.

The findings regarding fourth graders' awareness of audience and their understanding of structural features of narrative discourse raise interesting questions about their development as writers in particular and about the development of writing abilities in general. Although it was not the purpose of this study

to address the issue of writing development, it is nonetheless illuminating to examine some of the questions this study raises about the development of writing abilities.

The results indicate that as early as nine or ten years of age, children may have internalized a narrative schema that may influence their decisions about structuring narrative texts. One question, then, might be how early do children internalize a narrative schema. Mandler and Johnson's work on comprehension suggests that such a schema is in place by at least age seven. These findings point to a radically different approach to writing instruction in the primary grades than the approaches currently practiced in most American schools. Instead of delaying writing instruction until students have better control over spelling and mechanics, for example, teachers ought to capitalize on the linguistic abilities children bring with them when they enter school. Teachers can assume that young children are capable of producing text, and they can design instruction that provides children with the opportunity to practice and improve their writing abilities. Editorial considerations can be easily and more sensibly attended to within the context of the child's writing.

Researchers may want to investigate the development of other production schemata in young writers. By what age, for example, do writers develop a "cognitive map" for persuasive discourse? Finally, as with most hypothesis-generating research, this study raises questions about the generalizability of the findings. These questions remain for further study.

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